THOUGHTS ON THE SURRENDER OF KATHY POWER

(An interview with Marilyn Buck, Political Prisoner, in response to the NEWSWEEK article of September 1993 concerning Kathryn Power. The interview was for the DOWNTOWNER, a New York City weekly, December 1993.)

Q: Why do you think NEWSWEEK chose to do the story on Kathy Power at this time?

A: In a capitalist society, fame and recognition are commodities, usually with a very short sales life. The moment is exploited for all its worth; oftentimes by the individual or institution in the spotlight, but all the time by the media, the illusion makers. They create the saints and the demons.

Captures, particularly surrenders, are moments of celebration for the state -- a chance to affirm its power, despite its being disavowed or challenged. Imagine challenging the power of the biggest, baddest domestic and international military machine on the planet! How dare they, we, she ... me! To psychologize, and label such behavior as deviant is imperative. Never again does the state want to see an uncontrollable or unpredictable rise of different sectors of the population against its policies and programs, or its existence as such. The U.S. incessantly broadcast that the bombing of Iraq and the supposed national consensus supporting that manufactured military manuever has laid to rest the infamy of the defeat in Vietnam. It has a pathological fear of decolonization and national self-determination. Standing in the '90's, the propaganda establishment seizes every opportunity to declare the '60's -- that time of standing up for liberation, justice, self-determination, and against the status quo of white Amerikka -- dead, an aberration.

Kathy Power's surrender was perfect for spectacularization. Her surrender was a perfect vehicle to reinforce the "see-what-happens-when-you-stray-from-white-Amerikka" line. This is not the first time sensational stories have hit the press about the radical

returned to the fold. Most recently, there was an interview in the N.Y. Times, Living Section, with Bernadine Dohrn. There is a fascination with a woman who defied the system, who she is today; and a reassurance that she has been cured of "excessive opposition."

Q: How would you characterize NEWSWEEK's political and ideological slant on the Power article and the accompanying piece by Jane Alpert?

A: NEWSWEEK fulfilled its ideological and political role in how it presented this story: Woman-in-misery-because-of-her-political-past. They would have liked to have squeezed out an admission of remorse, but being depressed had to do.

I think it's interesting that the NEWSWEEK article chose not to say anything substantial about her current political views. Is she still an anti-racist, pro-Black liberation, against U.S. imperialism? Her statement upon surrender is not reported in this article. Perhaps because she did not capitulate in her earlier beliefs that the war was wrong, that Black liberation was important to support?

NEWSWEEK ignored what she said, and instead relied on a pseudopsychological rendering -- a focus on depression and the Betty Crocker lifestyle. (Of course, they forget to cite any statistics on the prevalence of clinical depression in white middleclass women in their forties...) By concentrating on the past, the "moment" and the flight, as well as the reintegration into the safe white world, the media did not have to say a word about who Kathy Power is as a political person living in the world. Another reassurance to the readers. From reading NEWSWEEK and other articles, I don't have much of a clue as to who she is socially or politically. My first response was, "oh, the prodigal son/daughter line."

If Kathy Power's depression doesn't provide an example of "divine punishment," then Jane's middle Amerikkan nighmare should flesh it out -- struggle against the system is a childish illusion,

a romantic diversion that turns out not to be such a lark after all. Jane's piece is intended to say "resistance doesn't pay," from one who can say she too challenged the state, but repented. Under the guise of feminism, Alpert continues to be quite a vocal mouthpiece for reconciliation with the system, patriarchal or not.

The actual intent of the NEWSWEEK article, as well as the majority of the "establishment" media, is to continue to delegitimize resistance to U.S. imperialism and capitalism touted as democracy. Despite its inherent weaknesses, the U.S. has emerged more predatory, in the absence of any countervailing power. It is a warning ... "Don't even try it."

Even the "Revisiting the Radicals" gallery, while stating the bare facts, is designed to say, "see, it is only a phase, YOU CAN NOT WIN!"

Q: Why do you think NEWSWEEK uses a lot of psychological jargon in this spread?

A: NEWSWEEK uses a psychological format to examine "objects" of its focus. Also to convince people they know what they are talking about.

The state is obsessed with trying to understand why white people would "drop out" or challenge the system. They won't admit that there is something seriously pathological in the system, so they seek to convince the public there is something wrong with those who oppose their system.

The expectations and heady sensation of change of the '60's and '70's may be overwhelmed by two decades of unrelenting conformism and systematic desensitization of political, social and moral consciences, but the reality of oppression, exploitation and social injustice is greater than ever. It will not disappear. Even now it is intolerable. Too much white supremacy, too much poverty, prison and social repression. Too little justice and too few jobs. The L.A. uprising was only one seismic shock to this structure. The demand for justice and national liberation has not

subsided.

Here in the oppressor nation, there is still a segment of white youth who drop out, become anti-establishment punkers drawn to hip-hop and the rap of the beseiged African-American youth, who are alientated and angry, sometimes not yet exactly sure why but squatting, looking for new forms of protest, examining history, asking questions and rejecting a history of racism and genocide; youth who are consciously, deliberately opposed to this system. There are still socialists, anarchists, anti-racists, anti-facists. There are 1000s and 1000s of women, lesbians who refuse to go back. The potential for struggle within this oppressor nation has not been crushed or thrown into the wastebin of history.

Q: Are there any similarities between Kathy Power's life and yours?

A: I am a woman who lived a number of years in clandestinity. There are of course some similarities in our lives -- being white, from the middle classes, having become political activists in the '60's against the war in Vietnam, and for Black liberation; and we both lived lives underground. For myself, I also know that becoming a politically active woman was not an overnight experience, that I was not misled by some charismatic character. It was a thoughtful process, an examination of what the nature of this system is, of my own role both as object and, more importantly, as subject to fight the oppression. I do not know Ms. Power's history of politicization, but I definitely mistrust the media's reductionist scenario of girl-meets-convict-and-is-manipulated.

I think the differences between our lives are more important. I did not feel it necessary to divorce myself from political struggle to survive; and I did not surrender. I was captured -- imprisoned without negotiation. There were no peace talks, no offers of plea.

Living underground is not a romantic endeavor or diversion, as Jane Alpert must have initially imagined it to be. It is difficult

and personally heart-wrenching to be separated from one's family, friends and one's political cohorts. And yet people all over the world who have to struggle for survival and against grinding, brutal oppression lead lives of value, of resistance, no matter the deaths, the separations they endure. Being underground is not about escaping a life not liked or not fulfilling. Who one is does not rest on one's name or birthdate, but rather on how one lives and acts.

It is hard to say very much without getting specific, and that I can not do. I suspect that is something the state repressive apparatus would read with great interest.

I remember a conversation I had with a comrade a number of years ago, at the time Bernadine Dohrn and her now-husband Bill Ayers negotiated their own surrenders. The comrade sadly, and a bit angrily, stated that there was not one of us who were engaged in liberation struggle who would not wish to be home, but in Amerikka not everyone can do that and live safely, secure from attack. I think that is true.

Certainly, it is much more possible for white people than for people from the oppressed nations to do so. I think of the FMLN comrades who have been assassinated after returning to public life from clandestinity, after all the agreements and international assurances. I wonder how many more will die at the hands of the death squads; Salvadoran society is still not safe for revolutionaries and militants who advocate for social justice, nor for the everyday working woman, man or child.

Being white gives one privilege, so the possibilities that exist to surrender are much greater. In this last decade many white people have retreated, either inured to the escalating racism and socioeconomic oppression, feeling they have done all they can, are not to blame, or are frightened at the possible consequences. Ms. Power retired into the sanctuary of white Amerikka. By that I mean that she, as a white woman, had the privilege of escaping notice by retiring into the expected "normal" white life. She did not have to fear being stopped by the police merely because she

looked like a "suspicious person." White people are not suspicious! Only if one acts suspicious, refuses to conform. Certainly, in the first period of flight, there was danger because Ms. Power was suspicious; she was hunted. The full weight of the repressive apparatus had been unleashed; radical white women were under attack for having possibly supported her and Susan Saxe. However, after the threats and intimidation did not work in a number of radical women's communities because of a refusal to collaborate with grand juries, the relentless hunt was thwarted, and the danger diminished. The state was not prepared to terrorize white Amerikka to capture Ms. Power, certainly not to the degree it did hunting Angela Davis or Assata Shakur in Black Amerikka. Once Ms. Power established a conforming identity she was relatively safe. But feeling safe and being safe are not always the same thing. One can be safe and not feel that. Conversely, one may feel relatively secure, believing that one has not betrayed oneself or been betrayed, and not be safe.

I can say this because I too was hunted. After the initial fear of being the fox before the hounds subsided, I found that it was relatively easy to be an unassuming, unnoticed white woman. It was assumed that I was a part of the white social consensus. My social credit was good. More than once, police even rushed to my aid ... unrequested. The same police might then rush off to snarl at someone Black or Latino ... ready to shoot to kill. I was also able to continue being a political person. It did not stop me from challenging racism, or working in social programs. Not until I was discovered to be that traitor to the capitalist white supremacist consensus. Then my white skin lost its American Express creditability. The state's agents went haywire. And here I am with a total of 80 years.

Q: Why are neither you nor Linda Evans in the radical gallery sidebar?

A: With the exception of Kathy Boudin, none of the more than 100 political prisoners and POWs are mentioned in the "Revisiting the Radicals" sidebar. None of us have surrendered or repented. Ms. Boudin had been spectacularized in 1970 after the explosion of a

town house in the Village, so she was "revisited." Very few of those of us now in prison were marketed by the media as "fame" commodities. We are buried as much as possible. Those political prisoners and POWs, such as Leonard Peltier or Geronimo jiJaga Pratt who are becoming better known, were not propelled by the press into "fame." Rather, it has been through the struggle of many people to bring attention to the reality that both these comrades were framed by the COINTELPRO agencies, have been denied new trials, release, even in the face of concrete evidence, that they are known. Mumia Abu Jamal, a former Black Panther, MOVE supporter and a journalist, sits on death row in Pennsylvania, framed by the state. He's an established journalist, but NEWSWEEK journalists, nor others in the establishment media have yet, in more than 10 years, written an investigative piece about the fact that the government is marching him to the death chamber!

NEWSWEEK did not write articles about the Tribunal held in New York in 1991, in which charges were brought againt the United States for its treatment and continuing detention of the political prisoners and POWs from the New Afrikan and Black, Puerto Rican, Native American, Hawaiian and Mexican national liberation movements, and the anti-imperialist and peace/anti-war movements. No establishment press wrote a major article on the 1992 Tribunal charging the U.S. with the genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans and the colonization of North America and the Caribbean, held in San Francisco on the 500th anniversary of the European invasion of the Americas.

Political prisoners are definitely not in fashion. The same people that want us silenced, that continue to exact vengeance, certainly would not encourage its publicists and propagandists to bring any attention it can avoid to who we are and why we are.

Q: Has the Clinton administration dealt adequately with issues of political prisoners in the 1990's, from your point of view?

A: No. Even those with the most clear cut cases are being denied under this new administration. Comrades like the New York 3 -- Nuh Washington, Herman Bell, and Jalil Muntaqin -- have had legal

efforts unjustly denied, even though the government misconduct was flagrant -- disappearing evidence which would have undermined the state's court case. Silvia Baraldini, an Italian citizen, has repeatedly been denied repatriation to serve her sentence in her homeland; each time the Italian government has requested her transfer, the Justice Dept. has refused because she refuses to "cooperate"; that is, to disavow her political views as an anti-imperialist. There has been no attempt to resolve the demands for the release of the Puerto Rican POWs and political prisoners, or decolonization.

Sundiata Acoli was refused parole this year, after more than 20 years in prison! Those comrades who have been released were released because there were no other legal ways to keep them locked up. They were denied going to half-way houses, at a time when the Federal Bureau of Prisons has been trying to send more people to half-way houses. Because they are "a danger to the community!" Teachers, writers, productive human beings ... a danger?

Most other nations at some point have come to terms with political movements that have opposed or do oppose the state. Political prisoners have been released and given amnesty all over the world by state apparatuses that had reveled in brutality and torture. But nothing has changed in the U.S.

Every one of us comes out of a movement that struggles for liberation, social justice and human dignity. Supporting us is a part of supporting these movements. Until the movements challenging U.S. state power regain strength and momentum, until there is a powerful voice raised by you who are concerned with human rights and justice, I do not think the government, no matter who is in the White House, will make any qualitiative moves in the direction of justice. FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS AND POWS!